

ALL SMOKE

Is a general proposition, which persons who are scrupulous to the letter in their statements might choose to modify into "Nearly all people smoke." There is a small minority who refrain from smoking; but those who do not smoke are considered, by those who do, as very poor creatures indeed.

Sometimes, on contemplating the hourly indulgence in this universal habit, this cosmopolitan luxury, I ask myself how the world—that is to say, the Old World—got on before A. D. 1500, or thereabouts. We were all poor creatures then; our mouths were undecorated with cigars, our pockets ungarmented with lucifers, vestas, and neat little volumes of cigarette paper. No young ladies, then, embroidered tobacco pouches, or sold them at fancy fairs for fancy prices. The tinder-box and its substitutes were confined to the kitchen, or to the baggage of serious enterprising travellers who might have to roast their dinner over dry sticks, after shooting it and preparing it themselves in the forest. The meerschaum, the yard of clay, and the brat-guac, or short, black, snazzy burner, were equally unknown, and there is no tobacco-smoke without fire; and yet the world did get on, somehow, before A. D. 1500.

"All Smoke" is so slight an operation, that it might be said to pass unperceived at all. It exceeds, in all ducks and geese swim, with this exception, if they do not concur, certainly do not invalidate the rule. It may be granted, too, that the habit of smoking varies in intensity at different spots of the globe. In France, smoking wears the teeth out of the workman's mouth at an early age. He cannot work without his pipe; while his hands are busy, his lips must put the ever-ready pipe to his mouth without it, he cannot digest. Thereafter, without it, he cannot sleep. On a holiday, especially, he cannot take his pleasure without it; he cannot go to sleep without it. Paley said that teeth were made, not to ache, but to eat with. A French artisan's or laborer's teeth were given to him to hold a pipe. That is the final cause of French dentition ever since the creation of the human race. For the last five thousand years it has been perfecting itself for that main purpose. It would not stand wear and tear that many of these teeth have stood. But considering that teeth are so valuable for other purposes besides pipe-holding, I wonder that that ingenious nation has not invented some patent indestructible mouth pipe-holder.

Then again, in Germany, do they smoke, or don't they? It cannot be denied that they do, a little. Not to insist on what the vulgar do, I will merely instance the ways of the German professor, as sketched by an able contemporary. Your German professor never gets on in the world, and he smokes all the day and most of the night. It must be allowed that no one, not even the Turk, nor an English emigrant, nor a French peasant of the Département du Nord, can smoke anything like a German professor. A really practical and hardened German professor will not only smoke, but he will smoke at the moment of his waking hours, but he will smoke all through his dinner, taking alternately a mouthful of food and a mouthful of smoke. His spending years in proving that being and not being are the same, and that they are not the same, and if not, why not, and how otherwise, might seem to be irrelevant to the all-smoke question; but some people might reasonably opine that it is only a natural consequence of the smoke.

In Northern Italy at least, smoking on the wing has become so general a practice, that almost as much attention seems paid to your whiff by the way as to your reaching your final destination. At the Turin station, you step out on the platform, to take your place in a departing train. "Fumare! Fumare!" shouts the guard, pointing to a second-class carriage. "Non Fumare! Genoa!" says a traveller who is making his first appearance on this stage. "I don't want to go to Fumare, but to Genoa. I don't even remember to have seen Fumare either on the time-table or on the map. Non Fumare, non Fumare, se vi piace, if you please." "Non Fumare! Non Fumare!" again shouts the guard, pointing to a contiguous carriage. "The train is going to Genoa, sir; but 'fumare' indicates the carriage where you may smoke, 'non fumare,' where you may not."

"Ah! thank you. To be sure!" he said. "My Italian has grown rusty, for want of use. I took Fumare for a station!" Nor may we neglect the American exploits in the smoking line. A letter from Wisconsin mentioned the existence there of an individual named Joseph (it should have been Methuselah) Crile, who was supposed at that date (April, 1866) to be the oldest man on earth. He is, or was, a Frenchman, born in the neighborhood of Yvetot, in Normandy. His baptismal register assigned him, then, the respectable age of one hundred and thirty-three years. He is still active, able to cleave wood, and to walk distances of several miles. His habits were regular; his consumption of drink was moderate; but he could not live without smoking from morning till night. If tobacco be a poison, we must either hold that it is a very slow one, or else suppose that Methuselah Crile had attained what is technically called "a tolerance" of its influence. From the anecdotal records of the juveniles, the Journal of Education, of Ohio (date unknown), informs us that in one of the schools of that State, consisting of five-and-thirty boys and girls, there are nine little boys who quit, and five little girls who never smoked. The Journal seems annoyed by that statistical fact. "We say nothing about the quidding," it wails aloud; "but when we think of the smokers, we almost fancy ourselves in the Sandwich Islands." The Journal is wrong in expressing surprise at a good-headed nation like the United States; the young idea, taught or untaught, will sometimes make extraordinary shoots. All that remains for American mistresses of deportment to teach young ladies, in great ways of holding a cigarette, and of making the smoke, as it escapes, invariably curl in the line of beauty.

In the novelty with which America presented us, only three hundred years ago, has been attractive to any of the senses, we might be less surprised at the hold it has taken of all the Old World populations. But its power is quite paradoxical. Although the plant of itself is of portly men, prepared tobacco, which pleases or invites the eye; while to the taste, the smell, the stomach, it is at the outset absolutely offensive. Who is there who does not remember the painful experiment of learning to smoke?

Amongst others, Napoleon I never could or never would learn. In Egypt, he pretended to smoke—as he held out his possible conversion to Islamism to the Egyptians by adopting their customs. But he never could light his pipe himself. It was his Mameluke Roustan's duty to set it going. If his master let it go out again, charcoal and matches were not ransomedly expensive. Afterwards, when the Persian ambassador presented him with a very handsome pipe, he ordered his valet de chambre, Constant, to fill and light it. The valet being applied to the mouth of the bowl, all that resulted was to make the tobacco catch; but in the way in which his Majesty set about it, no smoke would have appeared from that time till doomsday. He simply closed and opened his lips, without drawing the least in the world. "What the deuce!" he exclaimed at last. "There is no setting light to it." Constant diffidently ventured to observe that the Emperor did not proceed exactly in the usual way, and showed him the right mode of going to work; but the impatient scholar still returned to his bad imitation of the act of yawning. Tired at last of his useless efforts, "Constant," he burst out, "do you light the pipe; I cannot!"

So said, so done. It was returned to him with the steam well up, going at a high-pressure

rate, with a double Persian power of smoke. Scarcely had he drawn a whiff, when the smoke, which he did not know how to get rid of, went down his throat, coming out again through his nose and eyes. As soon as he had recovered his breath, "Take it away!" he gasped, "take it away! What an infection! What a set of pigs they must be! It has turned my stomach!"

He was ill for more than an hour afterwards; and he renounced forever a pleasure whose enjoyment, he said, "was only good to fill up the time of idle people with nothing better to do." Nature certainly has done her best to deter us from the use of the dreamy weed; and, as happened long ago, men cannot resist the temptation of forbidden fruit. And when I say men, I include with them women. Ladies might possibly be seduced by the same spirit of contradiction when they first thrust powdered tobacco up their pretty noses. According to the doggerel song put into the mouth of a snuff-taking lady, somebody said they should not; consequently, they would:

"A pinch of snuff?
That's a horrid stuff!
Take it? No, indeed, I can't!
Such, Sally, dear,
Of our husband said 'You shan't!'
"You shan't!" to me!
Fiddle-dee-dee!
Of course I take it on the sly,
For 'shant' or 'shall,'
What husbands say is—all my eye!"

This spirited personage deserved, in return, to be addressed in the highland language in which Balzac (not the modern author who is requested to march a lady who is married in the days of Louis XIV. "Madame," he said, "permit my digital extremities to insinuate themselves into your tobaccoic concavity, to obtain from it a suitable reward for my services, and to condense the aquatic humors of my inundated and swampy brain.")

Who, again, would ever have supposed beforehand that the fumes on so respectable an article would ever produce an important item in the State's revenue? It is such a known to be the case in more than one European country. Fancy, some three hundred years ago, when Jean Nicot, king's advocate and ambassador extraordinary, first sent tobacco to France from Portugal, as a present to that monarch's queen, Catherine de Medici—only fancy a bold financier requesting an audience of the Cardinal de Lorraine, and addressing him to the following purport:

"Monsieur, knowing the treasury to be in a somewhat pitiable condition, I am come to propose a tax which will bring you in a couple of hundred millions of francs, cheerfully paid—voluntary contributions, to the State revenue. There will be taxpayers in every family throughout the land, and you will never have to seize or squeeze to collect it."

"State your project," the Cardinal might coldly reply.

"Monsieur, it is simply this. The Government has only to reserve to itself the exclusive privilege of selling a certain herb, which is to be reduced to a powder sufficiently fine for people to stuff it up their noses. The plant may also be left in the leaf, to be smoked, or burnt for the purpose of making the smoke."

"Your plant, then, affords a delightful perfume, sweeter than amber, musk, or rose?" "By no means," the speculator would reply. "It is unpleasant rather than not. I understand, it is a poison, but a life-giving, endowed with marvellous healing virtues—perhaps snatching men out of the jaws of death."

"Not at all, quite the contrary. The habit of stuffing in the powdered herb weakens the memory and destroys the powers of the senses. There are instances of its bringing on blindness and even apoplexy. Chewed, it renders the breath offensive and puts the stomach out of order. Inhaling the smoke is a different matter. It first attacks the organs in the chest, nausea, swimming in the head, cold, and cold perspiration; but in the course of time and by persevering, you gradually get accustomed to it."

"How many people do you believe you will find to be fools and idiots enough to punish themselves for your tax-gathering purposes by smoking this plant or stuffing their nostrils with it?" "There will one day be, Monsieur, more than twenty millions in France alone. I don't mention the millions in England, Germany, and elsewhere, because they, Monsieur, pay us no taxes."

If the Cardinal had ordered the scheme out of doors in a huff, or got him put into a lunatic asylum, his contemporaries would have given him small blame for it. And yet, as events have proved, he would have made a great mistake in rejecting that counsel. This leaf of badinage is the whimsical view which Alphonse Karr takes of the tobacco-tax question; but he exaggerates, perhaps, the dangers of the weed when employed with ordinary precision. Another of our countrymen, Eugene Pelletan, rival of our King James I in the violence of his contrabandist against tobacco, ascribing to it a considerable share in causing what he considers the decadence of France, is in a passion, and holds up for wine, landing it as the genuine national beverage, and utterly proscribing the use of alcohol. Drunkenness is his terror and aversion, while he brags of his eyes, his ears, his nose, and his health and sanity, and of his die and abstinence, madness and ruin. The flame of brandy burns up the blood, and the race of Frenchmen is dwindling away in consequence. The standard of height for the countrymen is reduced. Thanks to abstinence, thanks to the dispersal of beetroot—and the consumption of alcohol arguments every year—in another century, perhaps in less, the world will really behold Frenchmen consuming, per capita, unable to handle either spade or gun, like the French of old English caricatures. Now alcohol calls in the aid of tobacco, by the very nature of things, out of simple symmetry. One over-excites the brain, the other becalms and stupifies it.

According to Pelletan, the very introduction of tobacco could not happen in an ordinary way. The circumstances accompanying it were necessarily startling and fantastic, like the compelling charm of the magic wand of the enchanter. In the sixteenth century the mousson waited to Manila a vessel manned by apes of a singular species, dressed up like men, they imitated human shape so well as to cause an illusion for the natives of the coast of Asia. The inhabitants of the Indian Archipelago, accustomed to the small noses of the Malay race, could not behold without secret horror the comicalness of the Casilian type. The long noses became the hands of the short noses, thanks to the help of the arquebuse. The conquerors tamed the conquered race, reducing them to slavery. Do you know how? By stupefying and besotting them with cigars.

France opened a long resistance to the invasion of tobacco. The regent distributed it gratuitously, to excite a taste for it and create an artificial demand. The tobacco tax, at that time brought in a few hundred thousand francs, at the very outside. It now produces two hundred millions.

But, at least, in the sixteenth century, tobacco was not in powder, as it is now, and there was something sympathetic in the habit of taking it. The snuff box passed from hand to hand; fingers were thrust into it, in turn. The box itself represented a work of art, a jewel piece, a trophy of the heart, a portrait of some beloved object.

It was a mode well suited to the affected society of eleanante seigneurs, smart little abbés, giddy-brained duchesses, crumpled-up beauties, and the like. The snuff-box was a habit of the thumb in administering the pinch, by making the nose turn up more and more; gave it a defiant air; and the snuff itself, by peppering the mucous membrane, spurred the intellect, and the witticism completed. Heaven knows what sort of witticism! But the eighteenth century thought of little else than love-making, with an epigram now and then to break the monotony.

Snuff, necessarily inhaled into the nasal sinus, ended by destroying the sense of smell. If the eighteenth century indulged in the love of flowers, it did so unconsciously of their perfume. Its nose was stopped up. Now, whoever looks at the world consistently in the same time loses a portion of native faculty. Witness the blind and deaf and dumb. The eighteenth century, through its nasal deafness, became mad after games kept till it was high and tainted with the most insupportable sense of humor. The same reason it courted coarse amours, the gallantry of the lamp-post and the gutter. The Du Barry reigned every where, from the highest to the lowest, in aristocratic circles. Society too fool could only be managed by plunging it in the wash-tub of revolution.

And now that man has recovered his nose, that he can inhale the perfume of beauty and flowers, he extinguishes another sense, that is, another perception of the sense of smell. In tobacco by the mouth, he breathes it in smoke. He converts the sanctuary of taste into a chimney. He lines and impregates every corner of his palace with a sooty coal of nicotine. And yet that is the place where the soul speaks, the glorious communication of man with man, of man with woman. And when he loses the perception of the sense of smell, his lip infected by the pipe, the chimney, the fulsome vapor which reeks up from the window of an underground kitchen. What poetry can words of love retain when they present themselves to a man who is sooty? A woman must surely wait to pardon the man when she goes so far as to excuse the pipe.

It is in vain that Nature (who appoints sentinels to guard us from ourselves) protests against the use of the pipe, and that the soul protests against the use of the pipe. It does so charitably, who is the danger by the very difficulty we have in acclimating ourselves to tobacco smoke. The contagion of example draws us on; the demon of the pipe has long possession of us. No doubt the novice is long. We shudder with chilly ague fits; but by dint of undergoing the penance, we acquire the right of smoking offensively.

"The male portion of the French population are anxious to compete with Yarmouth red herrings and Hamburg smoked beef, which they are asked to dinner, as soon as they get back to the drawing-room they cast melancholy glances in all directions. What does it matter to them that their hostess's husband is wretched and clever? Has a young man the present day any need to toss back the ball, and answer one amusing speech by another? After dinner he is faint and languid; his thoughts are absent; his heart is wandering after his Havana cigar."

But, as a well-bred woman cannot convert her drawing-room into a pothouse, every creature who wears or might wear a moustache takes his departure at the earliest occasion, and goes his way to let his hostess know that he is not loitering back with her. He can smoke at ease, in the privacy of his study, or in the privacy of his study. Every evening *La Jeunesse Dorée* takes practical lessons in cynicism. Now and then an elegant moving in good society, in despair at the "old" severing humanity in two and condemning her to the present, she opens her eyes, endeavors to retain the deserters by opening smoking-room in her mansion, and herself setting the example with a cigarette.

But tobacco has a feller flavor in an equivalent, in the drawing-room. There, at least, it can be moistened with beer and brandy. And thus a stinking West Indian plant, burning in the human pullet, banishes the wine-glass more and more. Neither the perfumed product of Mexico, nor the aromatic of Virginia, can retain their holy on the smoker's palate. The unhappy wretch plunges his lip in a bitter decoction of hops, or swallows a glass of kirsch at a gulp, which is one way as good as another of giving him a headache.

Smoking, like drinking, is the consequence of having nothing to do, of disenchantment of the heart and mind. A prisoner of state alleged, "Before entering my cell, I was invited to take a pipe. I refused, because I had under bolts and bars, to beguile the weariness of solitude."

The increasing consumption of tobacco is frightful. Children ten years of age already smoke. But it is not only children who smoke. Tobacco is a poison—a slow one, if you will—but certainly a poison; for it benumbs the brain, extinguishes the memory, brings on giddiness, and finally engenders those horrible diseases, cancer and phthisis. The cure of phthisis, atrophy, and paralysis action. With every whiff of tobacco-smoke a man exhales an energy of a virtue. Germany smokes and dreams; Spain smokes and sleeps. Turkey who has been smoking for three hundred years has no longer strength to stand on her legs. Retiring on a divan, she dreams all day long. But Rousseau somewhere says, "A veritable nation will always conquer a horizontal nation." The cure of phthisis, atrophy, and paralysis action. With every whiff of tobacco-smoke a man exhales an energy of a virtue. Germany smokes and dreams; Spain smokes and sleeps. Turkey who has been smoking for three hundred years has no longer strength to stand on her legs. Retiring on a divan, she dreams all day long. But Rousseau somewhere says, "A veritable nation will always conquer a horizontal nation." The cure of phthisis, atrophy, and paralysis action. With every whiff of tobacco-smoke a man exhales an energy of a virtue. Germany smokes and dreams; Spain smokes and sleeps. Turkey who has been smoking for three hundred years has no longer strength to stand on her legs. Retiring on a divan, she dreams all day long. But Rousseau somewhere says, "A veritable nation will always conquer a horizontal nation."

Tobacco did not find its way into the different countries of Europe either through the same channel, or exactly at the same date. Its employment as an intoxicant and stupefier is probably as old as the first human population. So science, arms, and letters." Words of a physician, whose name he suppresses out of respect for the rest of his colleagues, had the singular idea of proposing the use of tobacco leaves as a salutary regulation for French Luceuxes! "As if," he says, "learning the pipe-and-cigar exercise were a necessary preparation for serious studies; as if such a preparation were not a necessary condition to a career of science, arms, and letters." Words of a physician, whose name he suppresses out of respect for the rest of his colleagues, had the singular idea of proposing the use of tobacco leaves as a salutary regulation for French Luceuxes!

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On entering, his Majesty received him cordially, remarking—"You, Jean Bart, are the only person allowed to smoke in the king's gracious reception made a strange alteration in the courtiers' manners. When he left the king they thronged about him, asking how he managed to get out of Dunkerque with his little squadron. Ranging them close together in a line before him, he pushed his way through, elbowing right and left, and pommeling them with his fists. Then, turning round, he said—"That is the way I managed it."

Sailors elsewhere had already indulged themselves both with the pipe and the quid, and so distinguished themselves from the rest of the service. But examples like these spread quickly, if not the gratification of curiosity—as happened even to the daughters of the Grand Monarque. One day, when they were indulging in the novelty, without asking their governess permission, they were surprised by the entrance of the king's valet, who was struck at once at the sight.

Copying the navy, the army soon smoked, beginning with the officers and not ending with the common soldiers; for now all France smokes like a man, with a single mouth, carrying millions upon millions of pipes afloat. The pastime is not confined to the bivouac, but is practiced everywhere, at all times, in all weathers. In all ranks of society, from the imperial eagle down to the peasant, Princes and courtiers, masters and valets, rich and poor, great and little, everybody smokes, all day long. Smoking is perpetuated on foot, on horseback, in private carriages, and everywhere, at all times, in all weathers. In all ranks of society, from the imperial eagle down to the peasant, Princes and courtiers, masters and valets, rich and poor, great and little, everybody smokes, all day long. Smoking is perpetuated on foot, on horseback, in private carriages, and everywhere, at all times, in all weathers. 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